

Some Interesting Finds of Overwintering Insects

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The potentialities of peeling tree bark for the discovery of hibernating insects are well known to entomologists. I myself have had some of my best finds in such situations, but two made in January 1980, in the neighbourhood of Stone, in Buckinghamshire, must surely be considered outstanding.

The first occurred on January 4th (at map ref. SP 773129). Having prised off the loose bark of a large felled elm, among several stacked for disposal at the edge of a field, I noticed a single ant-beetle (*Thanasimus formicarius* (L.)) wandering sluggishly over the exposed wood. Then, to my astonishment, I discovered a whole cluster of these attractive red, black and white beetles grouped close together near the cut end of the tree trunk. I collected twelve in all, taking them home for the purposes of closer study and photography. An interesting development was that, when exposed to light and a certain measure of (room) warmth, several of the beetles began to copulate and to run about at a speed typical of the species in summer, although when kept cool all returned to their hibernatory position, pressed close into the fissures of the piece of bark provided.

I have found ant-beetles, always singly, only once or twice before locally. One I watched in late August 1978 ran rapidly up and down the trunk of a sapling elm and its branches, systematically examining twigs, leaves and bole. Never before have I found them in numbers and never hibernating. It is also of interest that all the literature I have had recourse to mentions the species as being found only on conifers. Presumably the greater incidence of bark beetles (on which *T. formicarius* preys), associated with Dutch elm disease, has contributed to an extension of the species' distribution onto elms. Readers' comments on this would be welcome.

My second unusual find occurred on January 6th 1980, at the edge of a local deciduous wood (SP 773128), predominantly of elm, beech, horse chestnut, sycamore, etc. A young friend, Ralph Woodward, and I were examining the bark of a small felled elm when my companion spotted the larva of a snake-fly (*Raphidia* sp.) in a small cavity beneath the bark. He did not recognise it for what it was, but assurance as to its importance led to his discovery of two more, and I myself found two. I can count on the fingers of one hand the number of *adult* snake-flies I have seen locally over about 30 years' observation, so the revelation of five larvae within a few feet on one dead elm must surely be an event worthy of record! Incidentally, have any readers managed to rear species of this fascinating group? (I have since done so. — A. W.).

Some other insect hibernators

As a postscript to the above, it may be of interest to

mention some of the other insects I have found locally in similar situations. They include:

Xestobium rufovillosum (De G.) (death-watch beetle) (under bark of willow, near pond); *Carabus granulatus* L. (ground-beetle) (common singly under bark; group of five once found beneath oak bark); *Pyrochroa serraticornis* (Scop.) (cardinal beetle) (beneath elm and other bark); *Chrysolina* (*Chrysomela*) *polita* (L.) (leaf-beetle); female *Acheta domesticus* L. (house-cricket) (beneath isolated log in wet meadow); unpigmented (ecdysed) final instar *Forficula auricularia* (L.) (common earwig) (beneath hawthorn bark).

Dwellings and other buildings, too, are not without interest for overwintering insects. Only recently (November) I found a *Philaenus spumarius* (L.) froghopper, resting in a comatose state above my outside shed door. Indoors, one is always of course liable to find lacewings, ladybirds and vanesid butterflies. In October 1978 I encountered something rather more surprising: a fine specimen of *Dermestes lardarius* L. (bacon or larder beetle) on the wall of the gentlemen's convenience of a local Chinese restaurant. Perhaps I should have reported it to the local health authority!

Postscript

Since writing the above, I have done much further elm-bark investigating, which has resulted in the discovery of many more *T. formicarius*, as well as four more *Raphidia* (probably *maculicollis*) larvae, three of the latter from the same disease-affected elm which produced the five mentioned previously. (Three of the *Raphidia* were located by my young friend R. W., whose discerning eyes are invaluable for insect-spotting! One of them, a minute specimen only one-third of an inch long, found beneath a tree stump, astonished us both by its extremely efficient powers of reverse-locomotion involving looper-like doublings of the abdomen.).

I am now even more convinced that insects like these are becoming commoner and more widespread as a direct result of Dutch elm disease. It may be that the ant-beetles are attracted primarily by fungus-eating beetles, such as *Endomychus coccineus* (three of which I found beneath elm bark on March 17th) and, in particular, *Mycetophagus quadripustulatus*, which is exceedingly common locally on diseased elms. Certainly, when I introduced a number of *M. quadripustulatus* to my ant-beetles (many of which appear to be gravid incidentally) they were quickly reduced to eviscerated abdomina, wings and elytra! It was fascinating to watch the way in which the fungus-eaters were seized and carried away to be consumed under cover.